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ABSTRACT

Three propositions related to how Minnesota should address the needs of young children and their families are presented and discussed briefly in this position paper. The propositions are: (1) The Minnesota Legislature should mandate county boards/Human Service Boards to assume the leadership role in coordinating and planning services to young children and their families; (2) the Legislature should mandate that local school boards plan, organize and fund early childhood and family education services; and (3) the Legislature should mandate that county boards/Human Service Boards plan, organize and fund child day care services. These propositions are presented within the context of past and current trends at the local, state, and national levels. (Author/CM)

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PAPER ON THE

ROLE OF MINNESOTA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION

AND CHILD DAY CARE

Presented at the
Better Education Legislative Liaison Conference
by W. Gary Winget, Executive Director
Child Care Council of Ramsey County, Inc.
November 3, 1977

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Three propositions will be presented in this paper: (1) that the Minnesota Legislative should mandate county boards/Human Service Boards to assume the leadership role in coordinating and planning services to young children and their families; (2) that the Legislature should mandate that local school boards plan, organize and fund early childhood and family education services; and (3) that the Legislature should mandate that county boards/Human Service Boards plan, organize and fund child day care services. These propositions are presented within the context of past and current trends at the local, state, and national levels and only relate to how Minnesota should address the needs of young children and their families.

I. BACKGROUND

The United States has a long history of evolution of services to young children, and that evolution has at times been a "reactive" cultural, economic and social facilitator rather than an end in itself. Child day care services, for example, have been a means to another end -- more often than not, the child's welfare was a secondary goal.

Some of the significant and early milestones in the development of children's services were the initiation of publically subsidized child welfare services in 1811, and the organization of the first State Board of Charity in 1863. In 1885 Pennsylvania enacted the first licensing law for child caring facilities; in 1909 the first White House Conference on Children was held, and in 1912 the Children's Bureau became the first national agency in the world devoted solely to the interest of children. World War I brought the first surge of day care centers when mothers entered the labor market in large numbers; the Great Depression with its W.P.A. and other work programs brought about the first major growth in day care centers or nursery schools; and World War II created so many jobs outside the home for mothers that Congress passed the Lanham Act which provided free or nominal fee day care for 1,600,000 children; but each of these rises in public support for day care services resulted in a crash when the national crisis was over.

Other milestones in the development of childrens services were the opening of the first Montessori School in 1914; the formation of the Child Welfare League of America in the 1920's; the opening of the first nursery training school in Boston in 1922; and during the depression era the public for the first time focused on the value of early education with the employment of teachers, integration of the health, education and welfare disciplines in the operations, and administration by local school boards. In 1921 Congress passed the first Maternity and Infancy Act to improve the health care for mothers and infants; and in 1935 the Social Security Act brought about comprehensive child welfare services in the country.

During the 1950's and 1960's the development of services to young children continued. An emergent body of theory and research began to point to the beneficial effects of early stimulation, and in 1964 the Economic Opportunity Act provided funds for day care and launched Head Start. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act became law in 1965. In 1967 the Social Security Act was amended to allow day care in the Work Incentive Program and Title XX Social Service Program. Federal day care requirements were created, the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment Program was somewhat meekly launched, and a major federal tax credit was allowed for child care expenditures.

In the last few years, Minnesota has enacted the Child Care Facilities Act, mandated special education services for preschool children, launched the Early Childhood and Family Education Program, Early and Periodic Screening Program, and provided for a child care tax credit. Licensed family day care homes and day care centers have increased throughout the State, a network of recognized child care advisory committees have developed throughout the State, and the Governor has created an Interagency Committee on Young Children and Their Families.

II. PHILOSOPHY.

The philosophy underlying all of the past as well as future developments in children's services is that the family acts as the unit in society, primarily responsible for providing young children with the care and nuturing they need to grow and develop.

Therefore, if soceity's ultimate goal for young children is to assure them the opportunity to grow and develop to their full potential, society's role should be to support the family in carrying out its responsibilities and when the family is unable to fully meet its responsibilities, then society should substitute for the family.

III. MODEL FOR DELIVERING SERVICES TO YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

If Minnesota is to develop a comprehensive system of services which support the family in meeting its responsibilities for the care and nuturing of its young children, a "grand design" or model is needed to define the scope of concern, and to structure

the many and varied public and private supportive services offered to young children and their families.

Although the public and private agencies in Minnesota are rather advanced in the number and types of services they provide, the State is operating services in what may be called a "well-intentioned" vacuum -- no one is adequately fulfilling the leadership role required to coordinate and plan the delivery of comprehensive services needed by young children and desired by their families. A maze of services for young children and their families exists in both the public and private sectors, but no one can fully comprehend even now what they are, who they serve, and where the gaps, overlaps and inefficiencies exist. Minnesota needs to concentrate and focus its public and private resources on services for young children and their families. The results should be a comprehensive and understandable projection of Minnesota's goals, priorities, plans, and services for young children and their families.

The model for delivering services to young children and their families has three primary structural components: (1) a lead agency to plan and coordinate the array of specific services; (2) a series of development agencies to plan, organize and fund specific program services; and (3) numerous public and private provider agencies to deliver the specific program services.

For purposes of this discussion, the description of the model will be limited to its impact upon early childhood and family education services and child day care services at the local level.

IV. THREE PROPOSITIONS FOR CONSIDERATION.

Before proceeding it is necessary to clarify three key terms used in this paper.

First, "Services to Young Children and Their Families." These services are defined as all services intended to serve primarily young children and their families as well as caretakers and include such services as preschool screening, early childhood development, nursery school, day care, health, developmental achievement cen-

ters, training and other similar services.

Second, "Early Childhood and Family Education Services." These services are defined as an array of service elements designed to support the families and/or other caregivers in meeting the children's normal and special developmental needs. Early childhood and family education services include these elements: early and periodic screening, diagnosis and follow-up; special education; child enrichment and socialization experiences; pre-parent, parent, and caregiver training; resource centers and toy-lending libraries; as well as counseling and referral.

Third, "Child Day Care Services." These services are defined as services which supplement family care and nuturing when the parents are employed or otherwise unable to care for the child and are designed to meet the children's normal social-emotional, intellectual, and physical developmental needs. They include both formal providers (i.e., licensed centers, licensed family day care homes, and certified in-home baby-sitters) and informal providers (e.g., grandparents, neighbors).

It should be pointed out that the two terms, early childhood and family education services and child day care services, are operationally intended to be mutually exclusive even though one of the services may contain an element of the other service. For example, a full-day child care center will provide enrichment experiences, and an enrichment program may provide short-term care.

Having defined the three key terms, three propositions are offered for your consideration.

Proposition one is that the Legislature should mandate county boards/Human Service Boards to assume the leadership role in coordinating and planning services to young children and their families.

Since county boards are the major provider of children and family services, and since the Legislature is inclined to categorize such services as human or social services, and since the Human Service Board and proposed Social Service Block Aids bills

delegate the responsibility for such services to county boards/Human Service Boards, it is appropriate to look to these boards as the unit of government most likely to provide the leadership role in coordinating and planning all services to young children and families. Since coordination is a process for achieving results through the cooperative actions of independent actors, the county boards/Human Service Boards must be required to involve other public bodies and agencies as well as private bodies and agencies in the process of establishing comprehensive local goals, priorities, and service plans.

Proposition two is that the Legislature should mandate that local school boards plan, organize and fund early childhood and family education services.

The Early Childhood and Family Education Program funded by the Legislature has set the pattern for the development of such programs through local school boards. These boards should be required to plan, organize and be provided with the funds necessary to deliver the service elements needed and desired. The local school boards as well as other public and private provider agencies should be utilized in delivering the subsidized services in order to maintain a mixed system of service providers and draw upon the strengths and experiences of other public and private agencies such as City health departments, nursery schools, and private family service agencies.

Proposition three is that the Legislature should mandate that county boards/Human Service Boards plan, organize and fund child day care services.

The Title XX Social Service Program, existing Department of Public Welfare policies, and the proposed Social Service Block Aids bill give the county boards/Human Service Boards the authority to develop child day care services. In addition, counties have invested large sums of money in day care and have cooperated in the development of over 35 child care advisory committees that range across the State and assist the Department of Public Welfare in planning and allocating state grant funds for child day care services. It is logical, therefore, to continue to build upon the existing

county boards/Human Service Boards planning and organizing efforts and provide them with the funds needed to deliver the services. As is currently the practice, these boards should continue to utilize other public and private provider agencies for the delivery of subsidized services (e.g. non-profit centers, Community Education Programs, family day care homes).

V. CONFLICT OR COOPERATION AMONG THE ADVOCATES.

The critical question for Minnesota is, will the advocates for services to young children and their families blaze a trail of conflict or cooperation? Will we be drawn into the national fight among teachers' organizations, child welfare agencies, and child care advocates, or will we follow the trends being set in Minnesota? Will we consider child care and early childhood development as one word for the same service, or will we recognize the distinction Minnesota makes between early childhood and family education services and child day care services? Will we opt for all services provided by the public schools, or will we use the public schools as just one of the possible service development agencies and another of the available delivery agencies in the community? Will we lean toward a highly institutionalized service system, or maintain the mixed provider system?

VI. SUMMARY.

The active support of teachers' organizations for improved and expanded services to young children and their families is a positive development. However, Minnesota should not be drawn into the national conflict over who should control such services because Minnesota is far ahead of the nation in resolving the question of who should be responsible for developing and delivering the many and varied services needed by children. If Minnesota's teachers and child care advocates can cooperate, a giant step will have been taken toward the goal of assuring all young children the opportunity to grow and develop to their full potential.